

Eight

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Using the ESL Scales ... starting off

After teaching at a primary school for twelve years, firstly as a New Arrivals teacher and then as an ESL teacher, the prospect of transferring to a new school seemed both exciting and daunting all at the one time. My focus in the first year was to familiarise myself with the children and their ESL needs, the teachers and their routines and then begin to chart student progress using the ESL Scales. This would hopefully be of value to class teachers during the planning, programming and reporting stages of the teaching and learning cycle. This case study documents how I set about this task.

Appendices

- 8.1 ESL Student Profile Card
- 8.2 ESL Scales levels of achievement in the three strands

Context

Oakhill Drive Public School, located at Castle Hill in the Hornsby District of Sydney, opened in 1992 with a total enrolment of 192 children and six teachers. There were 44 non-English speaking background (NESB) children enrolled, of whom 14 were eligible for support under the ESL New Arrivals Program. The largest NESB group was Chinese. By 1997 numbers had exploded to a total enrolment of 686 with 171 ESL students (16 first phase, 32 second phase and 123 third phase) and 280 other NESB students.

At present, ESL students are scattered from Kindergarten to Year 6 with first, second and third phase learners in every grade. The largest NESB group is Chinese. Some children choose to play in groups with their Chinese speaking peers, though most mix with English-speaking background (ESB) peers and children from a variety of cultures. English is spoken in the playground with few students speaking their own language (L1). This seems to reflect the fact the children are becoming increasingly competent with and confident in using English.

All students in the school (K-6) learn Japanese as their language other than English and are keen to celebrate Japan's various festivals. A different culture and language, therefore, are not new to the ESB students, who accept and allow for newly-arrived children with varying levels of proficiency in English.

The first step

On arriving at Oakhill Drive in 1997, I was relieved to find a well established ESL program set up by an efficient, keen colleague. The ESL students were spread over 24 classes and the main method of teaching was withdrawal, along with classroom support of individual students. Thorough initial assessment of every child, plus copies of detailed enrolment information made my task of identifying students relatively easy. Mainstream teachers of course could not tell me much about their students, as the school year was just commencing and they had no prior knowledge of the students starting the year with them.

At my previous school, where there were considerably fewer ESL students, I was able to group ESL students in one class in each grade, without it appearing that we had 'ESL classes'. At Oakhill Drive, this would not be possible, not only because the significant Chinese population would result in 'Chinese' classes but also because of the large ESL numbers.

The use of the ESL Scales at my previous school had become an integral part of planning and programming, a useful tool to report to class teachers and an excellent way to track student achievement.

The task that I set myself at Oakhill Drive Public School was to commence using the ESL Scales but the dilemma was how to make it useful to class teachers without taking an enormous amount of time, that is, discussion about individual children with 24 teachers.

I puzzled over the best 'order' of how and where to start. This problem did not seem to surface at my previous school because I had attended the ESL Scales pilot course some time before and, as a result, I had 'fed' my previous staff small amounts of information about the ESL Scales and their use as I was learning about it myself.

Finally, I decided to speak to the principal and my supervisor, the deputy principal, and explain how I planned to use the ESL Scales. Both were extremely positive and encouraging. The principal cautioned me about not over-loading myself; just to do what I could. I found this advice beneficial, as it allowed me to do what I had in mind, without rushing. Knowing that I had support and understanding of the enormity of the task was a great help. As a result, I feel that what I am doing is thorough and will be useful when complete.

I decided on the order of my task:

1. Start Student Profile Packages for five first phase learners.
2. Introduce the ESL Scales to the staff, show them the student files already commenced and how mainstream teachers could use them.

After spending many years changing the 'look of' student files, I am now happy with the current version. It takes a while to set up but should be less time consuming to keep up-to-date than others.

The Student Profile Package is kept by the ESL teacher, but is readily available to all teachers. Each package is kept in a plastic sleeve and consists of:

a. ESL Student Profile card (Appendix 8.1)

This card contains details of first language spoken; date of arrival in Australia; date of entry into an Australian school; number of years in an Australian school; the scale for each strand of the ESL Scales – Oral Interaction, Reading & Responding and Writing – showing its relationship to the same strand in the English K–6 Syllabus. The card slides into the plastic sleeve and is the cover sheet for the package.

b. Enrolment Details

These are printed out by office staff following initial enrolment.

c. Initial Assessment

A number of basic assessments of oral proficiency of all learners and written proficiency of second and third phase learners. These tasks are carried out in the early days following the student's enrolment.

d. Work Samples

These are collected once or twice a term usually in writing, but some cassettes of children's reading are also collected. All work samples are date stamped.

e. ESL Scales Levels of achievement in the three strands

By developing one page where the pointers for strand organisers are set out across a number of levels (Appendix 8.2).

By placing three levels side by side the progression of the learner can easily be seen, as well as where he/she is going. This idea came from an ESL Scales Focus Group meeting. As the child shows competence in an outcome or in a particular pointer, it is highlighted. If the child is working towards the pointer, but not yet showing mastery of it, then just the dot next to that pointer is highlighted. Subsequent use of the ESL Scales to track progress is highlighted in a different colour. In this way teachers can see progress by the use of colour coding, e.g. Yellow Term 1 1997, Green Term 3 1997, Orange Term 1 1998 and so on. This proved to be a quick and easy method of documenting progress and was a welcome replacement for the pages of written recommendations that always followed previous assessment.

This ESL 'Student Profile Package' would 'travel' with the child for his/her ESL school education. It would be given to the class teachers at least three times a year — but as many times as they wished to use it.

Firstly it would be given in the first few weeks of the new school year to enable teachers to glance through and form a picture of the learner's level.

Secondly, it would be given at interview time with parents, which often occurs at the end of Term 2. Parents often confront teachers with concerns over tenses and word endings. Class teachers, with the pointers and outcomes in front of them, can comment positively on the progress that has been made.

Thirdly, it would be given at report time in Term 4, again to help in the reporting of achievement in English.

Time to assess ESL students should be written into the ESL teacher timetable. It is always difficult to find the time, but it is important. The two assessment periods I have chosen are at the end of Term 1, as this allows the child to become comfortable with English again after the 6 week holiday break, and then at the end of Term 3 which allows plenty of time to document achievement in time for Term 4 reports.

In preparing the Student Profile Packages I decided to 'start small' and collected work samples (all work samples collected are first drafts) for five first phase students and then highlighted achievement on the prepared ESL Scales Levels of Achievement sheets. By doing this I did not overburden myself. As these children were first phase learners I saw them about five times per week and came to know their abilities fairly well. Working with them in a very small group and on a withdrawal basis meant that I could look closely at their skill competencies and level of confidence.

During this time I also managed to set up a package for the other first, second and third phase students. Student Profile Cards and ESL Scales Achievement sheets had not been started for these students. The only items placed into these packages were work samples.

This has been useful when either I or a class teacher question why the learner is still having difficulty in particular areas. An examination of first draft work samples usually gives us a clear indication of where to go.

In setting up these other packages, I can see that my task of placing more students on the ESL Scales will not be as tedious as the first five, as I will already have work samples collected, and it will just be a matter of adding Student Profile Cards and then identifying achievements using the ESL Scales. Even though I had set myself the task of preparing five packages, I also hope to complete those for fourteen Kindergarten children, who are mainly first phase learners, by the first half of Term 4 as well. I have found first phase learners the easiest to start with because it is easier to identify their achievements from their limited range of skills.

Working with mainstream teachers

The second part of my task was to introduce the ESL Scales to class teachers. This was done as part of a staff meeting on catering for ESL students in reading. Multiple copies of the ESL Scales document were obtained from the Hornsby District ESL Consultant so staff could look closely while I guided them through the sections, as follows:

- an explanation of what the ESL Scales are
- the rationale for their existence and their use in the teaching/learning cycle
- a look at the 'Student Profile Packages' and explanation of how they were put together and their contents.

As a result of raising staff awareness I now take part in regular Grade Planning days that occur once a term. My role is to add an ESL perspective to lessons and the information gained from charting student progress using the ESL Scales, will help me to do this.

The staff were genuinely pleased to have the packages to help with reporting, planning and programming. All promised not to lose anything from inside and to return them intact three times a year!

Future direction

I feel that the ESL Scales are a valuable tool for ESL teachers to impart information about ESL learner achievement to class teachers. While working on this project two colleagues spoke of their work in allowing ESL students to also become familiar with the pointers (in a simplified language), so that students know where they are heading. I found this an excellent idea and will include this in the Student Profile Package for older students. It allows learners to chart their own progress and take a more active role in their own learning.

The next area of concern is how to report this information to parents. I have yet to speak to any colleague who is truly happy with an ESL report that is sent home to parents. So that seems to be the next step to investigate.

As with any task, patience and flexibility is required. I have found learning to use my time effectively and efficiently is the key to success, even small successes. ESL teachers need to allocate some time to both assessing students' needs adequately and recording achievements to ensure accurate and worthwhile information is gained so it can be used to help children improve their English language and learning outcomes.

ESL STUDENT PROFILE

Date: _____	
School: _____	Date of enrolment at this school: _____
Family name: _____	
Given name/s: _____	Date of birth: _____
Country of origin: _____	Date of arrival in Australia: _____
Language(s) spoken at home: _____	

Years of schooling an Australian school: (Tick appropriate years)

K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
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**Relationship between
ESL Scales Levels and Levels
of the English Profile and
Early Learning Profile –
Spoken English**

	8
	7
	6
ESL Scales Oral	5
8	4
7	3
6	2
5	1
4	Early Learning Profile
3	
2	
1	

**Relationship between ESL Scales
and English K–6 Outcomes – Reading**

		ESL Band C	
		ESL Band B	
		ESL Band A	
		ESL Band A1	
English K–6 Outcomes Reading			
	ESL Scales Reading		
	7		6
	6		5
	5		4
	4		3
ESL Beginning Reading	3		2
B3	2		1
B2	1		
B1			
		Early Learning Profiles	
		1	
			F

**Relationship between ESL Scales
and English K–6 Outcomes – Writing**

		ESL Band C	
		ESL Band B	
		ESL Band A	
		ESL Band A1	
English Outcomes Writing			
	ESL Scales Writing		
	7		6
	6		5
	5		4
	4		3
ESL Beginning Writing	3		2
B3	2		1
B2	1		
B1			
			F

THE ESL LEARNER BANDS — The ESL bands describe ESL learners' progressive achievement in English from any point of entry to school K–6. They provide a bridge to the English language requirements of the mainstream curriculum.

BAND A1	BAND A	BAND B	BAND C
Band A1 learners are working at the BEGINNING LEVELS of Reading and Responding and Writing on the ESL Scales.	Band A learners are working at ESL Scales LEVELS 1–3 in Oral Interaction, Reading and Responding and Writing, and have basic competence in English.	Band B learners are working at ESL Scales LEVELS 4–6 in ORAL INTERACTION , and LEVELS 4–5 in READING AND RESPONDING and WRITING , and have functional competence in English.	Band D learners are working at ESL Scales levels 7–8 in ORAL INTERACTION and LEVEL 6–7 in READING AND RESPONDING and WRITING and have extended competence in English.

Note: Pointers are not a checklist. Teacher's own pointers may be added.

ESL SCALES LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT IN THREE STRAND ORGANISERS

		ESL SCALES LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT IN THREE STRAND ORGANISERS		
		LEVEL B1	LEVEL B2	LEVEL B3
Beginning Writing Strategies	Beginning Writing Strategies	<p>B1.8 Experiments with drawing and writing to produce or reproduce symbols and letters. Evident when students, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate writing-like behaviour (write or draw when others write or draw). • Hold writing implements in a suitable grip. • Use different writing implements (crayon, felt-tipped pens, pencils). • Watch others write. • Copy what the teacher or other students write. • Draw pictures to communicate ideas. • Copy words, labels, sentences, signs, lists or pictures from the immediate environment. • Ask for something to be read or written. 	<p>B2.8 Uses some basic strategies to convey information in writing. Evident when students, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use illustrations to provide more detail about own writing. • Use words copied from various sources in writing (labels, signs, instructions). • Use a preferred hand for writing and drawing. • Dictate sentences about a drawing or an experience for others to scribe. • Imitate pronunciation, intonation and stress when reading their own writing with the teacher. • Practice writing words or sentences. • Practice writing English letter forms. • Check copied writing for accuracy. • Ask for the English word or phrase for something and how to write it in English. • Copy sentences and paragraphs from texts regarded as good models. 	<p>B3.8 Uses a number of basic strategies to produce and check written work. Evident when students, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and review writing in first language or English. • Repeat the same beginning patterns to generate amounts of text (I like... I like, At spring I..., In spring I... I am going ... going). • Use literary formulae derived from reading texts (Once upon a time ..., A long time ago). • Emphasise and clarify meaning (by using repetition, choice of vocabulary). • Rely on sound or visual features of words to attempt own spelling (vae for very, ah for are, purpl for purple). • Model writing on other texts (borrow some words, phrases or sentence patterns). • Develop a small bank of known words to use in writing. • Experiment with sound/symbol relationships (sound out words aloud before writing them). • Read own writing aloud to check for meaning and clarity. • Use simple resources to find words needed for own writing and to check spelling (dictionaries, own word lists, labels, signs, charts, environmental print). • Experiment with writing conventions (over-generalise the use of full stops).
Beginning Reading & Responding Communication	Beginning Reading & Responding Communication	<p>B1.1 Shows an interest in gaining and sharing meaning from simple visual and written texts in structured reading activities. Evident when students, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show interest in looking at books, focusing mostly on the illustrations. • Retell a story in the first language (while looking at a favourite book). • Respond to a story read aloud, supported by illustrations, intonation and repetition. • Share favourite illustrations with others. • Gain simple information from illustrations (How many aeroplanes can you see?). • Recognise own name when written. 	<p>B2.1 Gains and shares meaning from symbols, writing and simple texts read aloud. Evident when students, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Join in with shared reading activities (group readings of well-known books). • Complete simple activities around class texts (dramatise a story, paint or draw characters from a story). • Show a personal response to a text (role-play, draw a picture, show enjoyment). • Talk simply and give simple opinions about well-known books and stories ('I like that story'). • Assign a message to own writing, or own writing scribed by another. • Read short, learnt texts (a rhyme, song, repetitive texts). • Sequence a simple story or a process using pictures. • Read some environmental print (recognise words, logos, signs, letters, numbers on posters or advertisements). • Read some very familiar words in different contexts (recognise friend's name on worksheets, belongings). 	<p>B3.1 Reads well-known texts, drawing on developing knowledge of English, and responds to simple texts read aloud. Evident when students, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to new texts (read along with repetitive sections, predict what may happen in a story). • Retell simple stories read in class. • Identify features that have personal appeal (fantasy elements, favourite characters, favourite words and phrases). • Read back the same way consistently their own writing or own simple sentences scribed by another. • Read a well-known story with appropriate pauses and intonation. • Ask questions and talk about stories read in class (Who does what and why). • Obtain information from simple graphs and diagrams (indicate how many boys and girls are in the class from a bar graph). • Read well-known texts in context (daily date and weather sentences). • Read some isolated words from a well-known text from own writing or from a scribed sentence. • Read well-known words in new contexts (from the blackboard, from a chart).
Beginning Reading & Responding Language & Cultural Understanding	Beginning Reading & Responding Language & Cultural Understanding	<p>B1.2 Shows knowledge that print and writing transmit and record messages and stories between people. Evident when students, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect that a book or piece of writing will tell a story or give information. • Expect a consistent message from print (indicate when the ending of a well-known story read aloud varies from the original). • Know that others can read a book or a piece of writing even if they themselves can't (ask someone to read something). • Show enjoyment of a simple story by reacting appropriately (laughing, choosing the same story to take home). 	<p>B2.2 Shows understanding that print encodes meaning and that written texts have a structure. Evident when students, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show awareness that texts, stories and illustrations, and classroom writing are created by people to share a message. • Recognise the beginning and end of a story from the structure and layout of a book or from formulaic openings and closings. • Show an awareness of environmental print (ask the teacher to read a sign). • Show understanding of some common signs and logos (STOP signs). 	<p>B3.2 Identifies texts written for different purposes, relating them to own knowledge and interests. Evident when students, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks for stories, rhymes, books to be read. • Identify simple texts as factual or fictional (on the basis of layout, style, content). • Relate something learned from a text to own experience (by commenting, 'like my house in my country'; by identifying with the characters in a story, 'I can do that...'). • Choose suitable and interesting books to read. • Choose a card for a special occasion.